

Equity Suit Updates From The Courtroom

DAY 7 - JANUARY 14, 1997

Prior to the testimony of Dr. Deborah Collins of Virginia Tech University, Mr. Schmidt, attorney for the plaintiffs asked for certain documents which have not, as yet, been turned over by the defense. Mr. Schmidt said because of the lateness in the trial and the proceedings, he would withdraw his stipulations to these documents. Ms. Forney of the Attorney General's office said that she would get them to the plaintiffs within the next few days.

There was extensive introduction of Dr. Collins by the plaintiffs in an effort to present her as an expert witness. She has wide experience in the analysis of school finance data on both a policy level, as well as institutional research. She was qualified as an expert witness by the defense without objection.

Dr. Collins dealt with course work taken by students in the Commonwealth. The results of the study attempted to show the breadth and depth advanced placement courses and selected secondary subjects; comparing poor school districts and wealthy districts. The measure of wealth was the aid ratio as established by the state. The wealthiest districts were represented by 10% of the secondary students in the wealthiest districts, about 35,125 and the poorest by 33,126 of the poorest. (no district was broken up, so there is a small discrepancy). Students were then arrayed by the size of their schools, so that there would be like comparisons. Pittsburgh and Philadelphia were removed because of their size. They were treated in other sections of the study.

The results of the review were that in the sciences and math there appeared to be a wide scope of choices for students in wealthier schools irrespective of size. There were at least one course in the poorer district, but there were more courses and more students enrolled in the wealthier districts.

There was a distinction between advanced courses and advanced placement courses. For advanced placement there seemed to be more of a spread. Youngsters who were able to get these courses had a jump in college in reduced tuition because they had already gotten credit for the course. As an example, in AP courses, all schools seemed to offer at least one course. However the totals for all the schools tested, showed a preponderance of courses available at the wealthy schools.

Mr. Knorr cross examined Dr. Collins and asked her about why Philadelphia and Pittsburgh were not in the selection. Dr. Collins answered because the size might outweigh all other selections. Mr. Knorr pointed out that there were many other courses that seemed to favor poor districts, at least for those courses, vocational and agricultural. He pointed out that there were many fine programs that allowed students to go to vocational and agricultural schools and still go to college. Dr. Collins indicated that she, in fact, was one of those persons, but pointed out that there should be opportunities to choose from, not just one or two. Mr. Knorr pointed out that "not all students are cut out to take aesthetics and philosophy." The judge pointed out to the people in the court, all in suits, are people who had become successful because of their desire to continue their education, but that isn't the only curriculum to become a productive citizen.

Judge Pellegrini asked where the outputs numbers were. Mr. Schmidt indicated that will be coming. Dr. Collins stated that one of the things that you don't get when you limit resources is opportunity.

Dr. Richard Salmon is also a staff person at Virginia Tech. He is widely published. He has been accepted by federal courts and has been expert, for plaintiffs only, in Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alaska, South Carolina, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Montana and a number of others. Dr. Salmon's pointed out that there is a widening gap between the resources behind each student in both personal income and market value of property.

49% of the market value of property represents 1/3 of the students.

There are large divisions in spending among school district, which, according to one measurement are explained 56% by the property wealth of a school district. The poorest districts make the most severe tax effort. The effort is growing each year. The poor are making more of any effort, the wealthy are making less.

When you take the difference of even a \$1,000 dollars a student difference over a class of 25 students (\$25,000 per classroom) and multiply it by the years a youngster is in school it comes out to a large amount of money

Dr. Salmon described comparative statistics called the Gini Coefficient, The McCloone Index, the Federal range ratio among others that describe the differences of dispersion of wealth and expenditures among school district. He described these differences as "obscene."

Pennsylvania is one of the most disparate states in the nation, coming in at the sixth or fifth in most of these measures

There is not taxpayer equity in the system. The localities are taking up the slack according to Dr. Salmon and "wealth is the relationship between the quality of education."

Mr. Knorr pointed out that all of the statistics are relative to each other among the districts and nowhere in the study is there a explanation about what is "sufficient."

Judge Pellegrini had spent some time discussing the concept of fiscal capacity, wealth and the wealth indicators with spending. Mr. Knorr used a chart to explain what a mean (average) and a median was (1/2 of all the numbers). Mr. Knorr pointed out that the study that showed that PA was the 5th most disparate state in the nation in school funding was from 1989. Dr. Salmon said that was the latest numbers. Mr. Knorr also pointed out that the CPI was not used with some of the numbers. Dr. Salmon said that the numbers used were those gotten from the Department and that they were actual number.

On redirect Mr. Schmidt pointed out that the same information had just come from the Library of Congress in 1995.

Tomorrow's witness will be Dr. Kern Alexander and that will end the Plaintiff's case.

The intervenor's case will begin on Thursday with

Dr. John DeFlaminis, Superintendent of the Radnor School District in Delaware County

Dr. Bruce Kowalski, Superintendent of the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District in Delaware County